

## WRITING ACROSS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES: FOCUS ON LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL THOUGHT PATTERNS

Hosney M. El-daly

Associate Professor of Linguistics, Department of Linguistics & Applied Language Studies,  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences, United Arab Emirates University  
P.O.Box: 15551, Al-Ain (U.A.E.)  
hasan.mostafa@uaeu.ac.ae

DOI: 10.7813/jll.2015/6-2/36

*Received: 11 Jan, 2015*

*Accepted: 12 Feb, 2015*

### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate and interpret differences between native speakers of two language backgrounds - Arabic and Spanish writing in English. "Information about such differences may contribute to contrastive rhetoric research, which maintains that written first language texts by authors from different language groups vary because cultural conventions dictate the choice of linguistic and structural aspects of discourse. Therefore, this case-study aims at analyzing the narrative texts of native speakers of two language backgrounds: Arabic and Spanish. This study argues that if we, really, accept English as a global language, and diversity of cultures, we have to better understand the different composing conventions of different cultures; otherwise, written communication among people of different cultures may break down. The subjects were ten foreign graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh, USA. They belonged to two different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The data were taken from (1) a questionnaire; (2) writing a narrative text, and (3) individual interviews. The data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Results were obtained and conclusions were made regarding the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural aspects of narrative writing in English.

**Key words:** Narrative writing, Cognitive and cultural aspects of writing, contrastive analysis

### 1. THE PURPOSE

Despite the abundance in research on L<sub>2</sub> writing process, there seems to be a dearth of studies on the writing processes of Arabic and Spanish speakers narrating in English. Moreover, although the literature is replete with studies on the written production of L<sub>2</sub> learners, there has been (to my knowledge) no attempt to consider the writing proficiency of L<sub>2</sub> learners from the various interdependent aspects that influence it. The majority of the studies that have been conducted on the writing of L<sub>2</sub> learners have been concerned with a single aspect of the writing skill, either linguistic, cognitive, or cultural. No single study, to my knowledge, emphasized or investigated the three aspects combined. It is my contention that regardless of language proficiency, a writer, also, needs to master the essentially nonlinguistic intellectual and cognitive skills which underlie writing.

This study was conducted to investigate and interpret differences between native speakers of two language backgrounds - Arabic and Spanish writing in English. "Information about such differences may contribute to contrastive rhetoric research, which maintains that written first language texts by authors from different language groups vary because cultural conventions dictate the choice of linguistic and structural aspects of discourse. Therefore, this case-study aims at analyzing the narrative texts of native speakers of two language backgrounds: Arabic and Spanish. This study argues that if we, really, accept English as a global language, and diversity of cultures, we have to better understand the different composing conventions of different cultures; otherwise, written communication among people of different cultures may breakdown. This study was undertaken to answer the following questions: (1) what factors affect L<sub>2</sub> learners accurate performance in writing, apart from their level of morphosyntactic competence?; (2) from the cognitive perspective, do Arabic speakers differ from Spanish speakers during writing narrative texts?, and what is the nature of this difference (if it exists)?; and (3) from the cultural perspective, do Arabic speakers differ from Spanish speakers in writing narrative texts?, and what is the nature of this difference (if it exists)? Furthermore, Sorter (1988) points out that one of the chief problems in setting common tasks for culturally and linguistically diverse groups is in finding common experience in the mode of writing selected, as well as knowledge of the subject matter to be written about. In the present study, the genre of writing used was narration. The rationale for choosing narrative tasks is as follows: (1) it is more likely that all of the students in the present study would have had experience with narration, whether in oral or written form; (2) narrative compositions are the first type of composition that students learn in their native language (Indrasuta, 1988); (3) narration is a socially evolved; (4) such genres as narration may vary from culture to and from speech community to speech community (Hymes, 1972), and (5) narration is also a familiar form based on a simple type of organization.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1. Rationale

Writing is viewed here as a complex process. In order to help L<sub>2</sub> learners write effectively in a second language, researchers need to examine writing from, at least, three interrelated perspectives: (1) linguistic, (2) cognitive, and (3) cultural aspects. This view is compatible with Vahapassi's (1982) line of thinking. According to Vahapassi's (1982) analysis of the concept of writing, the important contextual factors in a writing situation are (1) cognitive demands related to the topic and content, (2) social and inter-subjective demands of writing concerning the purpose and audience of writing, and (3) linguistic and rhetorical demands of writing concerning the mode of discourse. With this understanding in mind, writing is

defined, here, as (1) a communicative act that differs from speech although both share some similarities. (2) A creative discovery process, (3) a problem solving activity, and (4) a complex process that is constrained by linguistic, cognitive, and cultural conditions. And, with this definition in mind, the present study is based on the following premises, drawn from Purves (1988) extensive research contrastive rhetoric: (1) morphosyntactic competence is only a prerequisite to writing in a foreign/second language. That is, the fact that a student can understand the structure of individual sentences in a language does not necessarily guarantee that he/she can produce coherent and communicative written texts in that language. In fact, several national studies have shown that students in the United States perform at a remarkably low level on writing tasks (Boyer, 1983). (2) A composition is a product arrived at through a process. Both are equally important for effective models of instruction. (3) Different composing conventions do exist in different cultures. Every culture has its own specific conventions that may distinguish it from other cultures. (4) Writing is a social phenomenon. It is an act for negotiating meaning with some identifiable set of human beings. And this requires far more than a minimal control of syntactic and lexical items in the target language. Finally, from a cognitive point of view, we might consider the fact that the demands on short term/working memory might exceed capacity because students must not only plan, compose, revise, and reflect but must also access vocabulary, grammar rules, etc. (see Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Beare & Bourdages, 2007).

## **2.2. Hypotheses**

The general hypothesis of this study was that although the subjects in both groups have, supposedly, reached a high degree of competence in English as a target language, their overall performance in the tasks used in this study will display various degrees of competence in English. That is, by comparing the performance of the five subjects in each language group, and that of each group's members against each other, we expect to see various degrees of performance. Specifically, it was hypothesized that the overall competence of second language learners is not systematic all the way (Bialystok, 1982). This study hypothesized also that, although the subjects in both language groups may share certain structural and stylistic commonalities in writing tasks, culturally and linguistically specific features will be apparent in their writing products. Similarly, the subjects in both language groups may have distinctive sets of cognitive behaviors while writing the narrative story (See Sebba et al., 2011; Gass & Mackey, 2011).

## **2.3. Subjects**

The subjects of this study were ten foreign students at the University of Pittsburgh. They belonged to two different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The first was from the Arabic language group and the Middle Eastern culture. The second was from the Spanish linguistic group and South American culture (See Table 1 in Appendix 3). The ten subjects were engaged in advanced graduate studies in various majors at the University of Pittsburgh. They can, therefore, be considered "advanced" language learners, and their overall competence in English is rather high.

## **2.4. Instruments / Tasks / Analysis**

A questionnaire was administered to elicit information from each subject. The questionnaire (See Appendix 1) consisted of two parts; each containing eight questions. The first part aimed at eliciting background information from each subject about his/her name, country, sex, age, linguistic repertoire and the extent of his/her exposure to the English language, either in his/her home country or in an English speaking environment. The second part of the questionnaire aimed at eliciting information about subjects' awareness of the nature of task they were asked to perform. Each subject in each language group was asked to write a narrative text on the topic stated in Appendix 2. After the subjects in both language groups wrote the narrative essay, they were interviewed individually. The interview with each subject focused on each student's written production in the narrative texts. Each subject was asked to describe how s/he approached the narrative text, how s/he started both essays, developed his/her thoughts and ended his/her essays. Each subject was asked to describe how she would write the same narrative essay in his/her native language; whether it would be the same or different, and finally how each subject perceived his/her native language and culture as possible factors in shaping his/her written production. This means that each subject was asked to retrospect and reflect on the cognitive aspects of his writing process of the text. Subjects' interviews were transcribed by the researcher and, then, reviewed by a native speaker of English with background in such tasks. The mechanism of conducting the interviews is based on Gass (1983:277) claim that one of the ways to understand the mechanisms of L<sub>2</sub> learners' performance is to ask them (learners). Specifically, Gass suggests that for second language learners the ability to think and talk about language might involve abstract analyses of a number of different types. It might include, for example, (1) analyses of their own language, (2) a comparison between their native language and the target language, (3) a comparison between their native language and other languages previously learned, or even (4) a comparison between the target language and other languages previously learned. With this understanding in mind, the interview was considered as an opportunity for each subject to retrospect and talk about his performance and/or his/her knowledge. This interview was inductively-oriented.

Analyzing the data was based entirely on the individual's explanations, and aimed at accounting for the differences within and across the two language groups. Similarly, each subject's explanation of how he/she approached the narrative text, how he/she started his/her essays, developed his/her thoughts and ended his/her essays was reported. Each subject's explanation of how he/she perceived his/her native language and culture as factors in shaping his/her written-production was also reported. In addition, some statistical operations were carried out as will be seen later.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1. Narration and Contrastive Rhetoric**

Gimenez (2011: 198) points out that "narration has been the focus of linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse analyses for the past forty years. This ever growing interest in narrative was termed 'the narrative turn' in several human sciences" (See Coates, 2003; Balfe, 2007; Pentland & Feldman, 2007; Labov, 1972; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative analysis can be traced back to Aristotle who described the structure of narrative plots as having a beginning, middle, and an end. Such a description, according to Hogan (2006) is still adopted by composition and narrative analysis to date. Narrative is often used interchangeably with 'story', 'life story', 'account', 'discourse', 'narration', and 'tale' with little or no difference in meaning. The term 'narrative' itself also refers to various things: 'the telling of something', 'a story' or 'stories' and a method of analysis as in 'narrative inquiry' (Gimenez, 2011: 200).

As Grabe and Kaplan (1993) indicated, the notion of contrastive rhetoric emerged in the middle 1960s from an essentially pedagogical impetus. In early research reported in Kaplan (1966, 1972, 1988), a large number of international student compositions were examined and a number of patterns emerged from those examinations: "it seemed clear that the writing in English of students whose native languages were Arabic, Chinese, French, Japanese, Russian, etc., was systematically different from the writing of comparable students who were native speakers of English" (Grabe & Kaplan, 1993:182). Kaplan (1966) sought to discover whether organizational papers of written material vary from culture to culture. Since the appearance of Kaplan's study, the notion of contrastive rhetoric, along with the issues surrounding the transfer of cultural patterns in L2 writing, has grown into an area of study. According to the proponents of this line of research, the style in which each culture organizes and presents written material reflects the preferences of that particular culture (Connor & Kaplan, 1987; Connor, 2002; Connor, 1997). Many research studies have confirmed that many ESI writers do use different first language rhetorical patterns when writing English.

### 3.2. Language, thought and culture

One of the most prominent debates in linguistics in the past century has been the issue of how language, thought, and culture are interrelated. The person most associated with the idea that language can influence both thought and culture is Benjamin Lee Whorf, an associate of Sapir. Based on his studies on several Native American languages, Whorf developed a principle that he called "linguistic relativity", which he defined as follows: "users of markedly different grammars are pointed by the grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observations, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world" (1956:58). This, essentially, meant that the language someone speaks affects how she perceives the world. Based on his analysis of the Hopi system, Whorf made the claim that language influences thought, which may in turn influence culture.

Scribner and Cole (1981) and Heath (1983) examined the relation of culture to discourse and particularly to written discourse. Both studies pointed to the fact that written texts, and the ways in which they are used and perceived, vary according to the cultural group to which an individual belongs. In addition, both studies pointed to two aspects of that variation: the content or what is written, and the rhetorical forms used to encode that content, both of which constitute the surface manifestations of cultural differences. In this regard, Purves (1988) maintains that written language and the activities involved in composing are highly conventional (Mu & Carrington, 2007; Casanove, 2004). To sum up, both the content and the language to express this content are culturally determined. To be effective, writers have to learn what is expected of them within their own culture.

Consequently, differences in cultural expectations are an obstacle for those who are learning to write in a foreign language. Under the influence of the norms within their own culture; they may deviate from the norms of the foreign culture in what kind of material are to be included in a particular variety of written discourse, what style is appropriate, and how the discourse is to be organized (Cooper & Greenbaum, 1988). Purves (1988:19) points out that "...the differences among rhetorical patterns do not represent differences in cognitive ability, but differences in cognitive style. When students taught to write in one culture, enter another and do not write as do the members of the second culture, they should not be thought stupid or lacking in "higher mental processes". Recalling Rumelhart's (1975) notion of Schema theory, it appears that in order for L<sub>2</sub> learners to write effectively in a second language, they must develop the schemata related to the written rhetorical styles of the target language. Thus, the L<sub>2</sub> writer has to become familiar not only with the linguistic forms of the language but also with the written discourse patterns and conventions of that language (Lillis & Curry, 2011; Nunan, 2011; Roca de Larios & Murphy, 2006).

## 4. RESULTS / DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Linguistic Analysis

In order to get a real understanding of the subjects' performance, we need to consider the number of errors in the light of how many words that each subject produced in each essay. Table (2) presents the performance of both Arabic and Spanish subjects in the narrative essay. The reader is reminded that the Arabic subject (1) and the Spanish subject (4) are excluded from the study because they did not make any grammar errors in their essays (See Appendix). Table (2) shows some characteristics of the students' performance in writing. First, the total number of words produced in the narrative essays ranges from 300 (Arabic subject 4) to 773 (Spanish subject 1), and the number of errors ranges from 3 (Arabic subject 3) to 22 (Spanish subject 5). As seen in table (2), in and across the two language groups, students' written productions were not quantitatively correlated to the number of their errors. That is, it is not necessarily the case that the more an individual writes, the more errors that he/she will make. Examining the data reported in Table (2) shows that some subjects were able to produce many words without making any grammar errors, such as Arabic subject (1) and Spanish subject (4). Other subjects were able to produce a large number of words with the least number of errors, such as Arabic subject (3). The ratio of the number of the words that Arabic subject (3) produced to the number of his errors in the narrative essay is 158:1. That is, he made one error in each 158 words, which is the highest ratio among the eight subjects. Other subjects produced the least number of words, but made the highest number of errors such as Spanish subject (5). The point, here, is that judging students' performance only on the basis of their words and errors, although important, might lead to a misleading conclusion. The next step is to examine the types of errors and their frequencies in the written production. The purpose is to see whether or not these L<sub>2</sub> learners suffer from a real deficiency in their knowledge of grammar. We also need to know the most troublesome areas of English grammar, so that language teachers can pay more attention to these areas in their classroom instruction. Consequently, table (4) illustrates the types of errors made by the subjects in the narrative essay and the frequency of each of these errors.

Table (4) shows that while the Arabic subjects have problems with various areas in English grammar, they seem to have particular difficulty in choosing the appropriate tenses. The errors in tenses represent 40.9% of the total errors made in the Arabic subjects' narrative essays, followed by prepositions (13.6%) and subject-verb agreement errors (11.4%). However, we should notice that the high percentage of tenses errors is due to the high number of errors that subjects (5) and (4) made in tenses. This probably implies that L<sub>2</sub> learners differ in terms of what can be considered as simple or complex, easy or difficult rules of grammar. Moreover, table (4) shows that the errors made by each language group were in thirteen categories, and although each group made errors in categories different from those of the other group, both groups made errors in seven similar categories. These are (1) tenses, (2) subject-verb agreement, (3) prepositions, (4) nouns, (5) pronouns, (6) missing direct object and (7) articles. For the Spanish subjects, verb morphology seemed to be the most

serious problem (33.8%). Whereas prepositions appeared to be the second troublesome area of grammar for the Arabic group (13.6%), nouns constituted the second difficult category of errors for the Spanish subjects (14.7%). Prepositions were the third difficult area for the Spanish subjects (11.8%), as well as tenses (11.8%). What is most worth mentioning, here, is that verbs appear to be the most difficult area for the Spanish subjects as a group. This situation is different from that of the Arabic group, in which subjects (4) and (5) contributed most of the errors in tenses, whereas in the Spanish group, the four subjects made errors in verbs. This situation may imply that, verbs could really be a serious problem that requires much attention. (See Brown, 2009; Conley, 2008; Ellis, N., 2005; Ellis, R., 2006).

Based on students' explanations of their errors, the following reasons were repeatedly reported by the Arabic and Spanish subjects: (1) lack of focus on or proper attention to grammar accuracy, which resulted from high rate of speed during writing; (2) students' inability to do more than one thing simultaneously during writing; (3) following or adopting speaking or conversation norms during writing; (4) deficiency in students' knowledge of grammar; (5) students' perceptions of priority in writing, which affected their interest in grammar accuracy; (6) first language interference, particularly Spanish; (7) nature of the writing task itself and, finally, (8) lack of practice.

#### 4.2. Cognitive Aspects of Students' Narrative Writing

Based on the subjects' explanations, it can be argued that narrative writing was some kind of problem solving activity in which the subjects were faced with a difficult or problematic situation. What is at issue, here, is how the subjects approached the narrative assignment, and how they handled the problems that raised to the surface during the production of a narrative text. First, the narrative assignment triggered various reactions; that is, students responded differently to the writing task. In fact, students' explanations show that their reactions were constrained by such factors as (1) their prior knowledge of what they were asked to write about, (2) their abilities to activate such knowledge, and (3) their own perceptions of what stories should be. For example, Spanish subject (1) thought of a story that **'would be interesting; a story that would be a kind of unique, special, that wouldn't be boring, or wouldn't be that long and, something [she] could remember very well, that[he] could remember most of the details' (Line:925)**. Arabic subject (2) thought of **'something bad' that happened to him, as if writing a story is some kind of remembering sad events only; 'in the first stage I didn't think about something good that happened to me' (Line: 301)**. Other subjects did not feel the need to spend much time in activating or searching for appropriate problems to write about. Rather, they thought only about the first situation they had encountered in the United States, and what it was all about. Arabic subject (3), for example, explained that he did not have to search for a problem to write about, and his first reaction or response to the writing task was thinking of the organization of his essay: how the problem (whatever it is) started, how it ended and how it was solved: **'I tried to organize my paper in these three aspects' (Line: 398)**. This does not mean that he did not have a specific problem in mind. Rather, what this means is that subject (3) already knew what he would write about. Consequently, he did not feel the need to spend time searching for a problem. In other words, it appeared that the writing assignment gave subject (3) the cue to the topic of his essay. In this regard, he pointed out that he chose the transportation system in the U.S.A. to write about because it constituted the first serious problem that happened to him and, it was clear in his mind. That is why it was easy for him to start writing his story. He also indicated that he did not think of the details of his story: S. 400... **"I spent, maybe, two minute just thinking about the structure of my writing, but when I was writing I did not think of organizing some ideas that will fill each paragraph because the story just came as a sequence"**. What is most worth mentioning here is that some of the subjects did have a full and complete plan for their narrative writing including the details that their essays should include. However, the Arabic subjects (4) and (5) talked about having some overall general sense of direction, but not knowing in particular what they would say. Such behavior has been called in the literature 'what next strategy' (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). On the other hand, other subjects explained that they did not have any plans before starting to write. They were mainly interested in putting on paper what they remembered. The Spanish subject (3), for example, did not even think of organizing her thoughts; rather, she wrote what she remembered. And although memory activation played a vital role in the subjects' narrative writing, it caused some subjects to skip parts of words, articles and to forget to write downwards they actually thought of. Also, as the Spanish subject (3) explained, she did not **have to elaborate on anything because it was easy [for her] to remember what happened'**(Line: 1204). Spanish subject (1) pointed out that before she started to write the story, she did not have a specific plan for the structure of the story or how it would look. Rather, she started to recollect the events in terms of their order. And although Spanish subject (2) did not have a specific plan in his mind of how the story would look, he had an idea about some points to develop through the narrative essay: **'I never start writing without to have an idea in my mind of what points I want to write about' (Line:1086)**. Spanish subject (3) indicated that she did not have any plan or schema in her mind of how the essay would look: **'I didn't know exactly what problem or experience I will be writing on' (Line: 1194)**. And since she had to write something, she tried to remember everything related to her first arrival in the United States: S.1196... **I didn't have a specific problem... I just wrote my experience as it occurred at that time"**, and S.1200. **I just started and I followed what my memory reminds me of what happened..... but I didn't know before I started that I will write these things**. Subject (3) indicated that it was easy for her to remember these events: **'because this happened to me and I have these things in my memory, and I will never forget them all my life' (Line: 1198)**. In addition, she pointed out that she was not concerned with the structure of her story in terms of beginning, middle and end. Rather, she wrote what she remembered: **'I didn't have to elaborate on anything because it was easy to remember what happened' (Line: 1204)**. Then, for subject (3), writing a narrative essay was just telling what happened as her memory operated during writing: **'I don't really know the rules... I just write'**. During the interview, the Arabic subject (4) indicated that when he read the writing assignment, he immediately thought of a problem he faced in the past, then, he started to recall the events, and, finally, thought of organizing these events and putting them in order. This sequence of actions implies that subject (4) did plan for his narrative essay. However, in terms of the content of his story, subject (4) indicated that he did not have a specific plan for what he would include in his story: he just started writing, relying on his memory: S.532... **"sometimes, I write something before something else... that is why I have some kind of problems in writing because, you know, sometimes I have to re-write some sentences because this happened before this or something like that"**. Drawing on subject (4)'s verbal explanations during the interview, it is clear that his perception of the writing task determined, in part, the quantity of his written production in the narrative essay. For example, his story is remarkably the shortest one. When asked to explain why his story was short, he provided the following explanation: S.550. **"Because I am trying just to be as much specific as you asked me to be, you know... I stick myself to your statement in the assignment... I put down what you were looking for"**. Although Arabic subject (5) reacted to the writing assignment as subjects (1), (2) and (4) did, he had his own perception of the writing task, which,

consequently, determined the content of his story. That is, although he, first, thought of a problem or experience to write about, he, intentionally, wrote about an experience, not a problem: S.687. **"I thought that writing about experience will be... I can elaborate it more on writing or I can have more information about experience than if I concentrate on a single problem because the experience, I thought, it was larger than a problem; so I can add or I can think about appropriate things about the experience.... I also wanted to write about something I will have no problem in going through the paper or in the chronicle order of the essay"**. Subject (5) indicated that before starting to write the narrative essay, he had in mind a series of steps to follow: **"I have the major steps in my mind but the details I went through them during writing the story" (Line:699). Moreover, he wrote the story 'very quickly' because 'I remember all these... I went through this experience; I remember everything' (Line: 697).** During the interview, the Spanish subject (5) pointed out that she did not plan for her writing; **'she just tried to express her ideas'**. And she was not able to write correct sentences while attempting to put the ideas on the paper. She attributed this to two factors: (1) she was unable to think in English and (2) lack of practice. That is, although her academic study is in English, she rarely writes in English because her teachers of Latin American history gave her the permission to write in Spanish. Even if she had to write some papers in English, she tended to rely on her American friends who, at the same time, need her help in Spanish. Moreover, students' explanations suggest that their main problems in writing narrative texts were (1) finding atopic to write about, and (2) starting their essays (opening statements), once topics were found. However, the subjects were able to overcome these two problems by adopting certain strategies. These were (1) a brainstorming process, (2) a memory search for a topic, which resulted in finding one complete problem to write about, pieces of problems, or one's overall experience in the United States, and (3) activation of prior knowledge that appeared pertinent to the writing assignment. Relatedly, students' behaviors during writing the narrative essay lend tentative support to the knowledge-telling model (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). This model presents writing as a fairly natural task. And although the writing task may have its difficulties, writers can handle them by making maximum use of already existing knowledge structures. The composing process, according to this model, begins with a writing assignment. This model also allows for large differences in outcome depending on the writer's knowledge of the topic and on the writer's sophistication in the literary genre. Analyzing the subjects' explanations shows that their main difficulty during narrative writing was finding a problem to write about, and how to start their essays. Although this was not an easy problem for all subjects, they had ways to handle it and find solutions; either by a brainstorming process or memory search or by activating prior knowledge that appeared to be relevant to the topic. Having succeeded in finding a problem, the subjects appeared to have no problem writing the essay without even stopping to recollect or organize their thoughts. At this stage of the composing process, the subjects appeared to totally rely on their memory and their main task was just telling about the knowledge or the event of their stories. Arabic subject (2) pointed out that it was difficult for him to choose a specific experience or problem to write about, because he had many ideas in his mind, but could not pick up one to be the topic of his story. His difficulty in choosing a problem was, also, due to the fact that he did not encounter **'strong or big bad experience... because I wasn't exposed to many problems'**. Consequently, his narrative essay was not, about only one problem; rather, **'it is more than one topic... more than one experience'** (Line: 303).

Moreover, he pointed out that his major problem in writing the narrative essay was how to start, not only the first paragraph, but also the first sentence of the essay: **'... you know, when I finished the first sentence in the first paragraph I felt it is easier than the beginning'** (Line:311). When asked to explain why this was difficult for him, subject (2) gave the following explanation: S.313. **When you start your essay or paper, you think about different problems.... different ideas... so your mind is like bad radio... too many waves... too many stations at the same time"**. Moreover, he indicated that it was difficult for him to think of ideas for his essay and write grammatically correct sentences. He provided the following explanation: S.292... **"we think as foreigners... we think in our own language first and, then, transfer... translate it to English, but sometimes you have in your language hut, sometimes, you have in your language but it is difficult to translate it... that, what makes it difficult... and makes your grammar mistakes appear a lot"**. Spanish subject (2), also, indicated that it was difficult for him to find a problem or experience to write about, but once he found it, it was easy for him to write down what he wanted. That is, he found it easy to move from one paragraph to another without stopping to recollect his thoughts: S.1090. **"... because the idea is one idea, but I developed in one paragraph to another, but if each paragraph has its own idea, this will be difficult... but when I talked about the same idea, it is a lot easier"**. His main problem however, was choosing the appropriate tense to express his ideas, **'that I was thinking and feeling something in the past but, at the same time, I have some reflections, ideas came at present'** (Line, 1092). He also indicated that it was easy for him to come up with ideas for his essay: however, it was difficult for him to express these ideas without making a lot of grammar errors. He also indicated that writing the narrative essay was not **'a big deal'** because he had been studying and working at the University for a long time, which had resulted in a lot of reading and writing in English and, consequently, he had become familiar with writing as an activity. He also offered the following justification: S.1098. **"my major of political science makes it easy for me to put things together... also, secondly; something personal or experience because you have that experience... you have to remember"**. Spanish subject (3) indicated that her main problem in writing the narrative essay was how to start it.

Moreover, she pointed that her main problem in writing the narrative essay was keeping balance between her thoughts and the speed of her hand during writing. The following is her explanation of this point: S.1210. **"May be my thoughts are faster than my writing... if I am not so fast, maybe I could pay attention to the organization... maybe, as we used to say, to put more flowers... to make the composition more nicely"**. In contrast to subject (3), the Arabic subject (4) indicated that his main problem in writing the narrative essay was **'the opening statement'**. In this regard, he gave the following explanation: S.536... **"how I will write it down... should I start this way, or this way or that way and how will I write it down... I know what happened in the first, but what I start with; that is my problem"**. Having decided on his opening sentences, subject (4) pointed out that he had no problem developing his thoughts because **'it wasn't hard to recall'** (Line: 538). At this point, he became concerned more with putting the events in order and in writing grammatically correct sentences: S.538... **"here I know what I am going to write and then start thinking how I am going to write it down in a good English... that is my problem"**.

Finally, the Arabic subject (5) indicated that he had no problem recalling all the events related to his story. His main problem, however, was how to organize his story: S.691. **"... I had many things in my mind related to this experience; so where to start?... so, I decided to write from I got the approval from the committee"**. Spanish subject (1) indicated that she did not have any problem writing the narrative essay and, she explained the reason as follows: S.933. **".....Because... because I had very clear in my mind what was the story I want to write about. I could recall it very easily... so, I didn't have any problem"**. Furthermore, she pointed out that she thought of how she would start the story and, that is why

she created, in her introductory sentence, what she called **'the context', 'where this story is occurred: when this happened, and how this happened'** (Line: 933). However, when she was trying to recall the events of her story during writing, she had to skip parts of words, articles and, she was unable to write down words she actually thought of. As she explained, **'the process of thinking is much faster than the hand in writing'** (Line: 935). It was however; easy for her to move from one idea to another because writing the story was a matter of just putting on paper what she recalled. That is, **'writing and recalling are one thing: it is not like you are recalling or writing two different events that are not related to one another'** (Line: 939). Consequently, she did not stop writing until she finished her story. She then reviewed what she had written but did not change anything: **'I thought I said the story I wanted to tell'** (Line: 941).

#### 4.3. Cultural Aspects of the Arabic Students' Narrative Writing

Analyzing the Arabic subjects' explanations of their native culture's effect on their narrative writing indicated that most of the effect is attributable to the Arabic language. For example, Arabic subject (1) indicated that Arabic affected his choice of the topic he wrote about, the ideas he included in the essay and the style of his narrative essay. More interestingly, he pointed out that he was consciously aware of the interference of his native language, and allowed it to happen on purpose. Subject (2) also indicated that his native language added 'beauty' to his narrative essay. However, this made him use certain expressions that may sound good, but at the expense of the meaning of the whole structure. Arabic subject (3) pointed out that because of Islamic beliefs that call for mutual trust among people; he did not try hard enough to work on his ideas. In addition, he seemed to be angry at the educational system of his native country. Arabic subject (4) explained that he tended to repeat some structures or sentences as a habit inherited from his writing in the native language. He also admitted that although he had been in the U.S.A. for a long time, he could not help thinking and translating from his native language to English. Finally, Arabic subject (5) totally denied any effect of his culture on his narrative writing of the narrative essay.

#### 4.4. Cultural Aspects of the Spanish Students Narrative Writing

Based on the subjects' explanations, it seems that there is no consensus among the Spanish subjects regarding the effect of the Latin American culture on their narrative writing. Although Spanish subject (1) indicated that both Spanish and American cultures are similar, subject (2) indicated that they are different. Their different perceptions controlled their beliefs about their own cultures as a factor of shaping their narrative written productions. Spanish subject (1) indicated that her native culture affected her choice of the topic, which represents the emotional side of her character. Also, her native language interfered in forming many of her English grammar structures. Subject (2) indicated that his native language did not affect this narrative writing because he wrote about something personal, and relied on what he remembered. However, Spanish grammar interfered in structuring many of his English sentences in the narrative essay. In addition, subject (3) denied totally any effect of her native culture on her writing, whereas subject (4) indicated that her culture affected her choice of the story she wrote about, without feeling any shame of writing about something that may seem stupid. However, she did her best not to sound as a Spanish speaker. That is, she tried not to reveal her identity through writing.

#### 4.5. Conclusion

Analyzing the data may motivate us to make specific conclusions. First, within and across the two language groups, students' written productions were not quantitatively correlated to the number of their errors. That is, it was not necessarily the case that the more an individual wrote, the more errors that he/she made. Second, some subjects were able to produce many words without making any grammar errors, such as Arabic subject (1) and Spanish subject (4). Other subjects were able to produce a fairly good number of words with the least number of errors, such as Arabic subject (3). Other subjects produced the least number of words but made the highest number of errors such as Spanish subject (5). The above finding implies that assessing second language learners' performance in writing is not an easy task. Relying only on the number of words produced in composition writing may not be an accurate or valid measure of students' linguistic abilities. For example, it may not be reasonable to suggest that Arabic subject (2), who produced 524 words in his narrative essay, is linguistically better than Arabic subject (3) who produced 473 words. The number of words only tells us that subject (2) was able to write more than subject (3), but it does not tell us anything about how accurate his writing was. In addition, relying only on the number of errors made in composition writing may not be a valid measure for students' linguistic abilities. That is, making the least number of errors in composition writing does not necessarily mean that the student-writer is linguistically competent, or vice versa. The point, here, is that we need to consider students' performance from more than one perspective. In addition to the number of words produced and the number of errors made, we need to consider an additional measure. We need to examine the ratio of the number of words to that of the errors. Students' proficiency in writing should encompass both elements of fluency, represented in students' ability to demonstrate facility in producing language; (i.e. total number of words) and accuracy, represented in students' ability not to make errors. For example, the ratio of the Arabic subject (2)'s number of words to that of his errors is 35:1, while that of the Arabic subject (3) is 84:1. This means that subject (3) was a more proficient writer than subject (2). The qualitative analysis of the data showed that there are many reasons for students' errors, in addition to students' incomplete knowledge of grammar. Two of the major reasons are (1) the complexity of writing in a second language; therefore, students were unable to do more than one thing simultaneously during writing, and (2) students' focus on the meaning and generating ideas rather than grammar accuracy. Based on the subjects' explanations during the interview, one can argue that writing in a second language is a multidimensional activity which requires L2 learners to do more than one thing simultaneously. In this regard, I argue that the attention theory, as explained by cognitive psychologists, may provide us with a reasonable and plausible perspective of students' performance. Two important features within the phenomenon of attention have been identified: (1) an individual can attend to only one thing at a time or think only one thought at a time. (2) Attention appears to be serial, in that we appear to attend to or perform first one thing, then another, and we find it very difficult to mix certain activities. That is, the focus of attention is only on one place at one times. S.1003...**because it is difficult sometimes to think of ideas and to think of grammar at the same time...that is the reason; in order to explain ideas very clearly sometimes you make grammar mistakes.** The above quotation suggest that students' errors are due, in part, to their inability to do two things at the same time: coming up with ideas and watching for grammar errors. Instead, they tried to think of ideas and put them on the paper, and then they may be able to check the accuracy of their structures. This suggests that attention must be devoted to each component of the writing activity. At the same time, however, we must accept the fact that beginning attempts at such multidimensional activity are often slow and error-prone.

The results of this study seem to support Perl's (1979) findings regarding the behavior of students writers. Specifically, Perl found that both skilled and unskilled writers discover their ideas in the process of composing. Composing, as described by some of the subjects, seems to be a process of discovery, exploring ideas and presenting them in the best way possible. It is creative and may not be based on a clear sense of direction or explicit plan. It is true that some of the subjects indicated that they had a specific plan before writing their essays; however, their plans were not static but rather dynamic, that is, it allows for further discovery and exploration. In other words, the subjects of this study seemed to experience writing as a process of creating meaning. Rather than knowing from the outset what is it they will say, these students explore their ideas and thoughts on paper, discovering in the act of doing so not only what these ideas and thoughts are, but also the form with which best to express them. Moreover, the composing behaviors of both Arabic and Spanish speakers appeared to correspond to what the knowledge-telling model says. Based on the subjects' explanations, it is clear that writing narrative texts was a matter of just telling about the knowledge or the events of their stories. Relatedly, their main concern in writing the narrative essay was to find a problem, and once this problem was found, all subjects explained that they did not have any problem putting ideas on paper. However, there was no interaction between text processing and knowledge processing, as the knowledge-transforming model maintains. That is, neither students' writing nor their knowledge had been developed as a result of a lack of interaction between the process of writing and students' existent knowledge.

In addition, the composing behaviors of the subjects do not totally support Flower and

Hayes' (1980) model of writing. Specifically, in terms of planning not all subjects planned for their writings. Those who planned for their writings were of two types: (1) some of the subjects did have a full and complete plan for their writing, including the details that their essays should include, (2) other subjects did have a general sense of direction, without knowing in particular what they would say. Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987) called such behavior "what next strategy." Some other subjects explained, however, that they did not have any images, proposition or feelings of knowledge to be used in writing. Rather, they wrote what they remembered; one event after the other. The Spanish subject (3), for example, did not think of organizing her thoughts and, as she said, she did not have to elaborate on anything because it was easy for her "to remember what happened." In addition, the only mental process that was identified by Flower and Hayes, and also found in the subjects' behavior was the process of "translating," which is defined as the process of turning ideas into written language. However, the two mental processes "reviewing" and "monitoring," as defined by Flower and Hayes, were never reported by the subjects except the Arabic subject and the Spanish subject (4).

Analyzing the Arabic subjects' explanations of their native culture's effect on their narrative writing indicated that most of the effect is attributable to the Arabic language. For example, one of the Arabic subjects indicated that Arabic affected his choice of the topic he wrote about, the ideas he included in the essay and the style of his narrative essay. More interestingly, he pointed out that he was consciously aware of the interference of his native language, and allowed it to happen on purpose. Another subject also indicated that his native language added 'beauty' to his narrative essay. However, this made him use certain expressions that may sound good, but at the expense of the meaning of the whole structure. Arabic subject (3) pointed out that because of Islamic beliefs that call for mutual trust among people, he did not try hard enough to work on his ideas. In addition, he seemed to be angry at the educational system of his native country. Arabic subject (4) explained that he tended to repeat some structures of sentences as a habit inherited from his writing in the native language. He also admitted that although he had been in the U.S.A. for a long time, he could not help thinking and translating from his native language to English. Finally, Arabic subject totally denied any effect of his culture on his narrative writings. In addition, based on the subjects' explanations, it seems that there is no common theme among the Spanish subjects regarding the effect of the Latin American culture on their narrative writing. Although, Spanish subject (1) indicated that both Spanish and American cultures are similar, subject (2) indicated that they are different. Their different perceptions controlled their beliefs about their own cultures as a factor of shaping their narrative written productions. Spanish subject indicated that her native culture affected her choice of the topic, which represents the emotional side of her character. Also, her native language interfered in forming many of her English grammar structures. Subject (2) indicated that his native language did not affect his narrative writing because he wrote about something personal, and relied on what he remembered. However, Spanish grammar interfered in structuring many of his English sentences in the narrative essay. Moreover, subject (3) denied totally any effect of her native culture on her writing, whereas subject (4) indicated that her culture affected her choice of the story she wrote about, without feeling any shame of writing about something that may seem stupid. However, she did her best not to sound like a Spanish speaker. That is, she tried not to reveal her identity through writing. During the interview, the Spanish subjects demonstrated what can be called 'cultural competence'. That is, they were aware of their native culture's ways of thinking as well as those of the target language. Moreover, based on the Spanish subjects' explanations, it seems that the Spanish culture's effect was constrained by such factors as the subjects' perceptions of their own culture, and the target culture, as well. It seems that the Spanish subjects tended to intentionally disreveal their identities as Hispanic. This is not to suggest that the Spanish subjects were not proud of being Hispanic. Quite the contrary, they demonstrated a great loyalty to their own native culture. But, they seemed to be concerned about other people's opinions of them and their culture. So, to play it safe, they tended to disreveal their identity.

In conclusion, this study suggests that writing in a second language involves three interrelated skills: linguistic, cognitive, and cultural. Regardless of language proficiency, students also need to master the essentially non-linguistic intellectual and cognitive skills which underlie writing.

#### **Pedagogical Remarks**

If culture can be defined as "the overall system of perception and beliefs, values and patterns of thought that direct and constrain a social group" (Porter & Samovar, 1991:15), then teachers must understand how culture must necessarily inform their classroom pedagogy. As Reid (1993:49) argues, "What teachers know about key cultural issues will determine what assumptions they make about their students, and their assignments. No philosophy of ESL teaching can ignore the dramatic effects that culture has on language learning in the ESL classroom".

As Brown (1986) maintains, by recognizing different world views and different ways of expressing reality, we can recognize some universal proper ties that bind us all together in the world. Similarly, Bennett (1988) and Wallace (1988) argue that both learning and teaching in a cross-cultural or multicultural classroom demand more than just tolerance for cultural differences; they demand appreciation and respect for differences. In this regard, Bennett (1988) states that intercultural communication is an interactive process, a mutual creating of meaning. Any form of cross-cultural communication is subjective in its interpretations; that is, absolute judgments cannot be made. It must be emphasized that

differences among rhetorical patterns do not represent differences in cognitive ability but rather differences in cognitive style. They should not be described as a stigma or a deficiency (Reid, 1993: 62).

## REFERENCES

1. Beare, S. & Bourdages, J. 2007. Skilled writers' generating strategies in L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub>: An exploratory study. In G. Rijlaarsdam, M. Torrance, and L. Van Waes (Eds.), *Studies in Writing*, Vol. 20. Amsterdam.
2. Bennett, J. 1988. Student development and experimental learning theory. In J. Reid (ed.), *Building the professional dimension of educational exchange* (pp. 105-119). Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press.
3. Bericiter, C. & Scardamalia, M. 1982. Knowledge telling and knowledge transforming in written composition. In S. Rosenberg (Ed.), *Advances in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 142-175). New York: Cambridge University Press.
4. Balfe, M. 2007. Diets and discipline: the narratives do practice of university students with type 1 diabetes'. *Sociology of Health and Illness* 29: 136-153.
5. Bialystok, E. 1982. On the relationship between knowing and using linguistic forms. *Applied Linguistics*, 3, 181-206.
6. Bitchener, J. & Bastukman, H. 2006. Perception of the difficulties of post graduate L<sub>2</sub> thesis students writing the discussion section. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 1-15.
7. Boyer, E. 1983. *High School*. New York: Harper and Row.
8. Brown, A. 2009. Students' and teachers' perceptions of effective foreign language teaching: A comparison of ideals. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93, 46-60.
9. Brown, H. 1986. Learning a second culture. In J. Valdes (ed.), *Culture Bound, Bridging the cultural gap in language teaching* (pp. 33-48). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
10. Casanove, C. 2004. *Controversies in second language writing: Dilemmas and decisions in research and instruction*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
11. Clancy, P. 1986. The acquisition of communicative style in Japanese. In Schiffelin, B. & Ochs, E. (Eds.), *Language socialization across cultures*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press.
12. Coates, J. 2003. *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
13. Conley, M. 2008. Cognitive strategy instruction for adolescents: What we know about the promise, what we don't about the potential. *Harvard Education Review*, 78(1), 84-106.
14. Connor, U. 2002. New directions in contrastive rhetoric. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36(4), 493-510.
15. Connor, U. and Johns, A.M. 1990. *Coherence in Writing*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.
16. Connor, U. and Kaplan, R.B. (eds.) 1987. *Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L<sub>2</sub> Text*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
17. Connor, R. 1997. *Composition-rhetoric: Backgrounds, theory, and pedagogy*. Pittsburgh, PA.
18. Cooper, C. & Greenbaum, S. 1988. Preface. In Purves, A. (ed.), *Writing across languages and issues in contrastive rhetoric*. Sage Publications, Inc.
19. Ellis, N.C. 2005. At the interface: Dynamic interactions of explicit and implicit language knowledge. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 27, 305-352.
20. Ellis, R. 2006. Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40, 83-107.
21. Eslamim, Z. & Fatahi, A. 2008. Teachers' sense of self efficacy, English proficiency, and instructional strategies. A study of nonnative EFL teachers in Iran. *TESL-EJ*, 11(4).
22. Flower, L. & Hayes, J. 1980. The dynamics of composing: Making plans and juggling constraints. In Gregg, L. and Steinberg, E. (eds.), *Cognitive process in writing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
23. Fries, C. 1945. *Teaching and learning English as a foreign language*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
24. Gass, S. 1983. The development of L<sub>2</sub> intuitions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(2), 273-291.
25. Gimnez, J. 2011. Narrative analysis in linguistic research. In Litosseliti, L. (ed.), *Research Methods in Linguistics*, pp. 198-215, Oxford: Blackwell.
26. Grabe, W & Kaplan, R. 1993. *Theory & Practice of writing*. Longman, London and New York.
27. Heath, S. 1983. *Ways with Words*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
28. Hogan, P.C. 2006. Continuity and change in narrative study. Observations on componential and functional analysis. *Narrative Inquiry* 16: 66-74.
29. Hymes, D. 1972. On Communicative Competence. In J. Pride and A. Holmes (eds.), *sociolinguistic*, Harmsworth and New York: Penguin, 986-93.
30. Kaplan, R. 1992. Applied linguistics and language policy and planning. In Grabe, W. and Kaplan, R. (eds.), *Introduction to applied linguistics*, MA: Addison-Wesley.
31. Kaplan, R. 1988. Contrastive rhetoric and second language learning: Notes toward a theory of contrastive rhetoric. In Purves, A. (ed.) *Writing across languages and cultures*. London and Newburg Park, CA: Sage.
32. Kaplan, R. 1966. Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, 16, 1-20.
33. Labov, W. 1972. *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
34. Lillis, T. and Curry, M. 2011. *Academic writing in a global context*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
35. Mu, C. & Carrington, S. 2007. An investigation of three Chinese Students' English writing strategies. *TESL-FL*, 11(1), 1-23.
36. Nunan, D. 2011. *Language and culture*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
37. Pentland, B.T. and Feldman, M.S. 2007. 'Narrative networks: patterns of technology and organization'. *Organization Science* 18: 781-795.
38. Perl, S. 1979. The composing process of unskilled college writers. *Research in the teaching of English*, 13(3), 17-36.
39. Porter, R.E. and Samovar, L.A. 1991. Basic principles of intercultural communication. In L.A. Samovar and R.A. Porter (eds.), *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (6th ed.) (pp. 5-22), Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
40. Purves, A. 1988. *Writing across languages and cultures: Issues in contrastive rhetoric*. Sage Publications.
41. Reid, J. 1993. *Teaching ESL Writing*. Regents/Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
42. Roca de Larios, J., R. & Murphy, L. 2006. Generating text in native and foreign language writing: a temporal analysis of problem solving formulation process. *The Modern Language Journal*, (90), 100-114.



43. Rumelhart, D. & Ortony, A. 1975. The representation of knowledge in memory. In Anderson, R., Spiro, R. and Montague, W. (eds.), *Schooling and the acquisition of knowledge*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
44. Scribner, S. & Cole, M. 1981. *The Psychology of Literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
45. Sebba, M., Mahootian, S. & Johnson, C. 2011. Language mixing and code switching in writing. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
46. Soter, A. 1988. The second language learner and cultural transfer in narration. In A. Purves (ed.), *Writing across languages and cultures: Issues in contrastive rhetoric*. Sage Publications.
47. Vahapassi, A. 1982. On the specification of the domain of school writing. In Purves, A. and Takala, S. (eds.), *An international perspective on the evaluation of written composition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
48. Vahapassi, A. 1988. The problem of selection of writing tasks in cross-cultural study. In Purves, A. (ed.), *Writing across languages and cultures: Issues in contrastive rhetoric*. Sage Publications.
49. Wallace, C. 1988. Learning to read in a multicultural society: The social context of second language literacy. New York: Prentice-Hall International.
50. Webster, L. and Mertova, P. 2007. Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method. Oxon: Routledge.
51. Whorf, B.L. 1956. Grammatical categories. *Language*, 21, 1-11.

## APPENDIX (1)

### PART ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Country: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Sex: Female: \_\_\_\_\_ Male: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_
5. How long did you study English in your country?
6. How long have you been in the U.S.A.?
7. Had you ever been in an English speaking environment before coming to the United States?
8. If your answer to Question (7) is 'YES' - please, state how long? And where

### PART TWO:

9. What did your previous English classes give most attention to? Please number in order of importance, #1 being the most important, #5 the least important.

Listening \_\_\_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_\_\_  
Writing \_\_\_\_\_

10. In your home country, what did your teacher of English give attention to in teaching writing? Please, number in order of importance, #1 being the most important, #5 being the least important.

Content \_\_\_\_\_ Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Vocabulary \_\_\_\_\_  
Grammar \_\_\_\_\_  
Language use \_\_\_\_\_

11. Do you think learning to write in English is important? Please explain your answer.
12. Do you think learning English grammar affects your writing in English? Please, explain your answer.
13. Did you learn to write English compositions in the form of stories?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
14. If your answer to Question (13) is 'YES', where did you learn it?  
In the U.S.A. \_\_\_\_\_ Back Home \_\_\_\_\_
15. Did you learn to write English composition to convince someone else of your opinion?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
16. If your answer to Question (15) is 'YES', where did you learn it?  
In the U.S.A. \_\_\_\_\_ Back Home \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX (2)

### WRITING TASK ONE: NARRATIVE ESSAY

Think back to when you arrived in the United States for the first time. Write a story about a problem or experience you had. Be sure to clearly describe this problem where it happened, who was involved, how you felt at that time, and how you reacted.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the subjects

SUBJECTS	COUNTRY	AGE	YEARS OF LANGUAGE	YEARS OF EXPOSURE TO ENGLISH IN U.S./ENGLAND	SPECIALIZATION
<b>ARABIC</b>					
1	Syria	30	10 Years	5 Years	Linguistics
2	Saudi Arabia	25	6 Years	5 Years	Physical Education
3	Saudi Arabia	34	4 Years	4 Years	Instruction/Learning
4	Egypt	44	10 Years	3 Years	Instruction/Learning
5	Kuwait	33	12 Years	4 Years	Public Administration
<b>SPANISH</b>					
1	Honduras	27	1 Year	5.5 Years	Sociolinguistics
2	El Salvador	27	2 Years	1 Year	Computer Science
3	Paraguay	39	2 Years	2 Years	Economic Development
4	Chile	38	25 Years	6 Years	Spanish Linguistics
5	Honduras	37	2 Months	2 Years	History

**Table 2.** Arabic and Spanish Subjects' performance in the narrative essay

Tasks	Arabic Subjects					Spanish Subjects				
	2	3	4	5	Total	1	2	3	5	Total
<b>Narrative</b>										
# of words	524	473	300	534	1831	773	398	428	317	1916
# of errors	18	3	9	14	44	18	16	12	22	68
Ratio	29:1	158:1	33:1	38:1	41:1	43:1	25:1	36:1	14:1	28:1

**Table 3.** Measures of Central Tendency of Arabic and Spanish Speakers' errors in the Narrative Essay

	Arabic Speakers	Spanish Speakers
Mean	8.8	13.6
Median	9.0	16.0
Range	18.0	22.0
Maximum	18.0	22.0
Minimum	0.0	0.0

**Table 4.** Types and frequencies of errors made by the subjects in the narrative essay

Subjects	Arabic						Spanish					
	2	3	4	5	Total	%	1	2	3	5	Total	%
# of errors	18	3	9	14	44		18	16	12	22	68	
<b>Types</b>												
Preposition	4			2	6	13.6	1	3	2	2	8	11.8
Sub-verb Agreement	3	1		1	5	11.4	2			1	3	4.4
Verb 'to do'	1				1	2.3				2	2	2.9
Copula	2				2	4.5					8	11.8
Article	2				2	4.5				1	3	4.4
Tenses	2		6	10	18	40.9	4	1		8	10	14.7
Pronouns	2			1	3	6.8		2				
Noun morphology	1				1	2.3		1				
So...that vs. too....to		1			1	2.3						
Missing D.O.	1	1			2	4.5				1	1	1.5
Many/Much			1		1	2.3						
Inf. Vs. Gerund			1		1	2.3						
Plural 's'			1		1	2.3						
Verb Morphology							7	7		4	23	33.8
Adverbs							1			1	2	2.9
Adjectives								1		2	3	4.4
Ind. Questions							2				2	2.9
Word Order							1	1			2	2.9
Comparative Form										1	1	1.5